From The College Board:

It seems like everybody has a different opinion about how to do well on the SAT essay. Some people say you should write a strict five-paragraph essay, with an introduction, a conclusion, and three specific examples. Some people say you should read well-known books like *The Great Gatsby* or *The Scarlet Letter* and refer to them as often as you can. Some people say that the real key is to write as much as humanly possible. Some say you should do all of these at once!

We want students to know that there are no shortcuts to success on the SAT essay. The high school and college teachers who will score your essay have seen it all before. These teachers are not going to give high scores to an essay just because it is long, or has five paragraphs, or uses literary examples. The scorers are experts at identifying truly good writing--essays that insightfully develop a point of view with appropriate reasons and examples and use language skillfully.

So what can you do to write a successful SAT essay? Here are some strategies the College Board would like you to consider:

### Read the entire assignment

It's all there to help you. Every essay assignment contains a short paragraph about the issue, usually from a specific author or book. Don't ignore this important information in your rush to answer the question. Imagine that you are talking to the author of the paragraph about the issue. What would you say to him or her? Would you argue or agree? What other ideas or examples would you bring up? Answering these questions will help you develop your own point of view.

### Don't oversimplify

Developing your point of view doesn't mean coming up with as many examples as you can. Sometimes students cut a great example short to move on to something else, and end up oversimplifying. Take the time to really explain an example; that's the best way to fully develop your point of view. An essay with one or two thoughtful, well-developed reasons or examples is more likely to get a high score than an essay with three short, simplistic examples.

### There's nothing wrong with "I"

You are asked to develop your point of view on the issue, not give a straight report of the facts. This is your opinion, so feel free to use "I," and give examples that are meaningful to you, even ones from your personal life or experiences. Of course you need to support your ideas appropriately, and show that you can use language well, but remember: the essay is an opportunity for you to say what you think about an important issue that's relevant to your life. So relax and be yourself, and you will do just fine.

“The Essay: SAT Writing Practice Essays – Strategies.” *College Board: For Students*. The College Board. 2010. Web. 29 Sept 2010. <http://sat.collegeboard.com/practice/writing-sat-essay?pageId=practiceWritingEssay&tabValue=strategies>

**SAT Holistic Scoring**: Each essay is independently scored by two readers on a scale from 1 to 6. These readers' scores are combined to produce the 2-12 scale. The essay readers are experienced and trained high school and college teachers. i.e. Reader One scores 5 – Reader Two scores 6. Your essay subscore 5 + 6 = 11

Mr. Guenther’s Advice:

**Planning**: (**Consider S.O.A.P. - )**

**Underline** the sentence or phrases in the assignment that must be included as **CONTENT**

**Brainstorm sources** that have a similarity or can bring support or contrast to the topic:

Other literature – books, short stories, movie adaptations, music lyrics

Personal experiences

Historic events

**“Jot” these down in the margin** of the assignment. Choose the one or two of which you have the most knowledge or can explain best.

**Create a brief outline (blueprint).** This step can help you to think the essay through entirely and avoid writing yourself to a blocking point. Also a visual “blueprint” will help you to keep a clear focus throughout the writing (if you continually refer back to it) and to be sure you are on track.

**Writing:**

**Develop your theme, thesis statement, topic sentence that will be the focus/base structure of the essay.** Leave some space when you write this on the essay paper. The best plan is to stay with that theme throughout, but should your writing veer you off course slightly, you have room to adapt or rewrite this key sentence as a revision.

The exact format is not as much of an issue as keeping your content organized, focused on your theme and fully explained. The reader should not have to fill in logic or explanation; do not assume they know, do not ask them to guess, YOU MUST TELL THEM and explain what you mean in your writing.

Resources:

College Board site:

<http://sat.collegeboard.com/practice/writing-sat-essay?pageId=practiceWritingEssay&tabValue=directions>

SAT Scored sample Essays – see a “6/6” essay:

<http://www.majortests.com/sat/essay-sample2.php>

Overview of several sites:

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/library/for-students-and-parents/sat-writing-examples.html>

Essay-practice.com

<http://www.essay-practice.com/SATEssaySection.htm>

<http://www.essay-practice.com/EssayStrategies.htm>

SAT Scoring Guide (from essay-practice.com)

<http://www.essay-practice.com/misc/scoring_guide.pdf>

MajorTests.com

<http://www.majortests.com/sat/essay-topics.php>

“The Essay: SAT Writing Practice Essays – Scoring.” *AP Central*. The College Board. 2010. Web. 29 Sept 2010. <http://sat.collegeboard.com/practice/writing-sat-essay?pageId=practiceWritingEssay

“The Essay: SAT Writing Practice Essays – Scoring.” *College Board: For Students*. The College Board. 2010. Web. 29 Sept 2010. <http://sat.collegeboard.com/practice/writing-sat-essay?pageId=practiceWritingEssay

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**Sample Essay Prompt**

You have twenty-five minutes to write an essay on the topic assigned below.

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Many persons believe that to move up the ladder of success and achievement, they must forget the past, repress it, and relinquish it. But others have just the opposite view. They see old memories as a chance to reckon with the past and integrate past and present.

*Adapted from Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Liberation*

**Assignment**: Do memories hinder or help people in their effort to learn from the past and succeed in the present? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Mathur, Helen. “SAT Esaay Topics.” In MajorTests.com Website. 2010. Web. 29 Sept 2010. < http://www.majortests.com/sat/essay-topics.php>.

1. Prompt:  
   "That which we obtain too easily, we esteem too lightly. It is dearness only which gives everything its value."  
   Thomas Paine

Assignment:  
Do we value only what we struggle for? Plan your response, and then write an essay to explain your views on this issue. Be sure to support your position with specific points and examples. (You may use personal examples or examples from your reading, observations, or, knowledge of subjects such as history, literature, science.)

1. Prompt:  
   If we are afraid to reveal our lack of knowledge we will not be able to learn. In order to make progress we must admit where we are now. Such an admission of ignorance is not easy. As Thoreau says, “How can we remember our ignorance which our growth requires, when we are using our knowledge all the time?”

Assignment:  
Does the present system of education encourage us to admit our lack of knowledge, or is there too much pressure to demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   “A little inaccuracy saves a world of explanation.”  
   C.E.Ayers

Assignment:  
Is it always essential to tell the truth, or are there circumstances in which it is better to lie? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   Many societies believe that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human right. But it is also true that attainment of happiness remains elusive. Perhaps Bertrand Russell had it right when he said, “To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness.”

Assignment:  
What gives us more pleasure and satisfaction: the pursuit of our desires or the attainment of them? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   “The price of greatness is responsibility.”  
   Winston Churchill

Assignment:  
Do we expect too much from our public figures? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   “A man should never be ashamed to own he has been in the wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.”  
   Alexander Pope

Assignment:  
Do we learn more from finding out that we have made mistakes or from our successful actions? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   “What man calls civilization always results in deserts. Man is never on the square – he uses up the fat and greenery of the earth. Each generation wastes a little more of the future with greed and lust for riches.”  
   Don Marquis

Assignment:  
With our modern awareness of ecology are we likely to make sufficient progress in conservation, or are we still in danger of damaging the earth beyond repair? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   A man who waits to believe in action before acting is anything you like, but he is not a man of action. It is as if a tennis player before returning the ball stopped to think about his views of the physical and mental advantages of tennis. You must act as you breathe.  
   Georges Clemenceau

Assignment:  
Is it true that acting quickly and instinctively is the best response to a crisis? Or are there times when an urgent situation requires a more careful consideration and a slower response? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   There is usually a kernel of truth in the words Oscar Wilde puts in the mouth of his most outrageous characters – they wouldn’t be funny otherwise. One such gem that is worth pondering is: *The only thing to do with good advice is to pass it on. It is never of any use to oneself.*

Assignment:  
Is it true that when we most need advice we are least willing to listen to it? Or is good advice always welcome? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

1. Prompt:  
   “Independence? That’s middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.” Bernard Shaw expected to provoke controversy with these words, but I would agree with him that these days there is too much emphasis on independence. While it is certainly true that excessive dependence on others is not a sign of maturity, total independence of others is neither attainable nor desirable: we need to be mature, and unselfish enough to recognize our *interdependence*.

Assignment:  
Do we put too much emphasis on self-reliance and independence, and are we afraid of admitting that we need other people in our lives? Plan your response, and then write an essay...

Following a format   
gives you the **confidence** that you can finish in the time limit  
ensures you **cover the topic** adequately  
gives a sensible **structure** to your essay

## FORMAT I - The one-example essay

Select one suitable illustrative example from your personal experience, or your reading, or knowledge of current affairs, history, science etc. and use this as the basis for a discussion of the topic. The example should be specific and ‘real’ rather than invented. It is best to avoid religion or politics or anything controversial.

There is no word limit but a limited space is provided. The space you have to fill is approximately one and a half sides of A4 paper. The space is sufficient to write a five-paragraph essay. You will have to write in pencil.

###### Paragraph 1: Introduction

Try to create interest in the topic.  
The introduction can be general but must include a thesis statement to point the reader in the right direction.

###### Paragraph 2: Part I of the example

Describe the situation and cover about half the “example” here.

###### Paragraph 3: Part II of the example

Finish the “example”.

###### Paragraph 4: Discussion/analysis

Explain what your example shows. Extract the conclusions/moral lessons to show how it supports your thesis.

###### Paragraph 5: General conclusion

Show how the example leads to more general conclusions about the topic. (If possible, relate to material from the introduction to round the essay off.)

Sample of this format: http://www.majortests.com/sat/essay-sample1.php

Mathur, Helen. “SAT Esaay Formats.” In MajorTests.com Website. 2010. Web. 29 Sept 2010. < http://www.majortests.com/sat/essay-formats.php>.

Following a format   
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## FORMAT II - The two-example essay

###### Paragraph 1: Introduction

Explain, in your own words, what the issue is. Include a thesis statement, which is a clear statement of your point of view.

###### Paragraph 2: Point one in support of your thesis

Explain the point you are making with the aid of a specific example.

###### Paragraph 3: Point two in support of your thesis

Explain the point you are making with the aid of a specific example

###### Paragraph 4: Qualification

Explain that, under certain circumstances, the opposite point of view might be correct. (This is to show that you are aware of all aspects of the issue, even though you are 80-90% convinced of your thesis.) [Sometimes this paragraph is replaced by another point and/or further discussion or reasoning.]

###### Paragraph 5: Reinforcement of thesis

Show how your viewpoint, despite the qualification you have just made, is more persuasive under the present circumstances.

Sample of this format: http://www.majortests.com/sat/essay-sample2.php

Mathur, Helen. “SAT Esaay Formats.” In MajorTests.com Website. 2010. Web. 29 Sept 2010. < http://www.majortests.com/sat/essay-formats.php>.